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Monday, June 28, 2004

### 'Reckless' Campaign Tactics

Fund-raiser notice falsely implies bigotry, misogyny among challengers

By N/A

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I have recently received notice of a fund-raising event sponsored by, among others, Mayor Shirley C. Franklin, for Justice Leah Ward Sears, Judge Bensonetta Tipton Lane, Judge Gall S. Tusan, Judge Wendy L. Shoob and Superior Court Clerk Juanita Hicks. To put it mildly, I am deeply disappointed by the message that accompanies the notice. According to the notice, the challengers for each of these positions are "all males [who] appear to represent special interest groups."

The notice goes on to criticize the "tactics special interest groups are utilizing" and suggests that "these challenges ... appear to be based upon race and gender."

No foundation is offered for these outrageous charges. Indeed, it appears that the charges are based upon nothing more than the race and gender of the challengers.

While I have the highest respect for many of the incumbents (and actually intend to vote for some of them), I also know and have high regard for many of their challengers. To lump together all of the challengers, including S. Angelle Moore, and to cavalierly brand them as being motivated by race and gender reflects a stunning level of recklessness and indifference to the truth. Making these kinds of baseless accusations without regard for their truth or the effect they have on others, like racism, is inherently wrong.

And who are these "special interest groups" whom these challengers represent? Caucasians? Men? That is what the notice implies; no other groups are identified. I am curious as to when these became "special interest groups."

None of these contests should be about race or gender, and I am unaware of anything that any of the challengers have done or said to make them so. Sadly, the politics of race and gender have been introduced by surrogates for the incumbents, hopefully without their knowledge or approval.

It is sad that we cannot to this day have a campaign in Fulton County or the state of Georgia without race being an issue. It is sad that a man cannot run for an office held by a woman without being branded a bigot or a misogynist. The historical underrepresentation of minorities in public office cannot be remedied by branding men and women of good will as bigots simply because of their race or gender or merely because they challenge incumbent members of minority groups.

Holding office in Fulton County ought to be about competence, not color. Judicial elections ought to be about character, not character assassination. If the incumbents for whose benefit this event is being held agree, they should repudiate the divisive message of their host committee and decline to participate in the event. That would show that character means more to them than cash and would go a long way toward confirming their qualification for the office they wish to keep.

CARY ICHTER

Atlanta

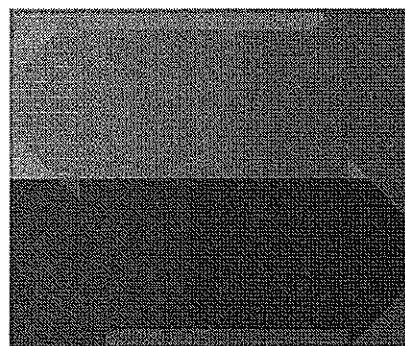
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